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Helms: A threat to name names

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INVESTIGATIONS: The Helms File

For the past eighteen months, the Justice Department has been pursuing the investigation of Richard M. Helms, former director of the Central Intelligence Agency, on charges of perjury and obstruction of justice. No one—not even Helms—denies that he misled a Senate committee about the extent of CIA operations against Chile's Marxist President Salvador Allende. But last week, President Carter suggested at his news conference that he would soon weigh the possible damage to national security if Helms were put on trial. And NEWSWEEK learned that Justice Department prosecutors are seeking White House permission to declassify pertinent documents.

Friends of Helms, who ran the agency from 1966 to 1973, indicate that he is prepared to name names and reveal secrets to defend his actions. "You've got [Henry] Kissinger involved, lots of high officials," said one long time associate of the former CIA director. "It would be pretty messy." Helms's lawyer, Edward Bennett Williams, has said privately that if Helms is brought to trial, he will seek to obtain CIA papers to show that every previous CIA director has lied to Congress, and that legislators frequently winked at the lies.

Coup: The basis for any indictment would be Helms's testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in February 1973. Asked whether he had the CIA pass any money to Allende's opponents, Helms answered, "No sir."

But a second Senate committee reported that the agency funneled \$8 million to Allende's opponents in the three years between Allende's election and the military coup in which he was killed.

Helms's friends say he is angry at what he considers the Justice Department's "persecution." And he could hardly have been cheered when Carter tripped twice at his press conference, referring to "the offense with which he *will* be charged" and later noting: "It's a very serious thing for anyone to commit perjury." Aides quickly explained that Carter meant to say "may be charged" and "alleged perjury." But there was speculation that he may have inadvertently tipped the Justice Department's hand—and that a Helms indictment may be handed up soon. The elegant, Establishment Helms was also said to be furious at a television show, the fictional "Washington: Behind Closed Doors," which cast Cliff Robertson as a Helmslike CIA director in a Nixon-style Administration as cold-blooded, given to blackmail and—worse yet!—adultery.